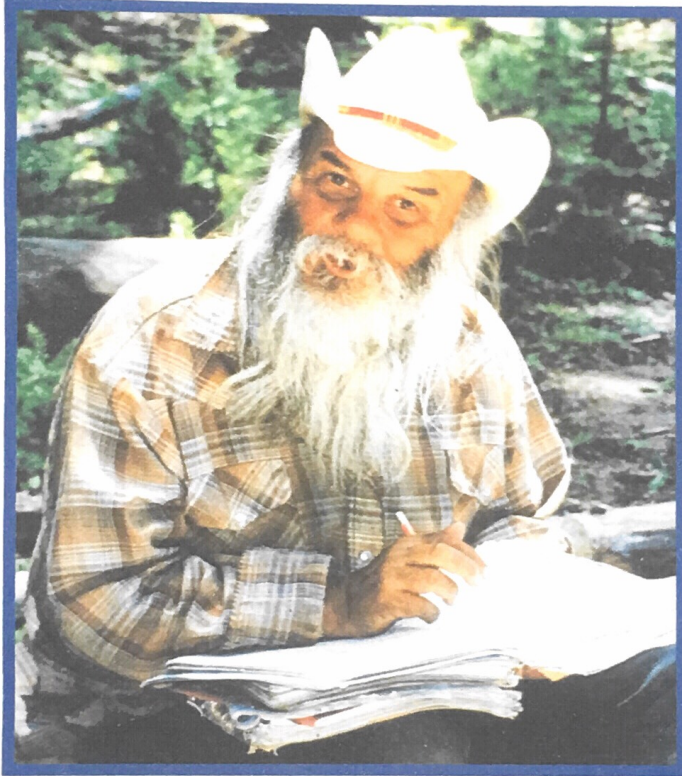




Rainbow Family

Life Stories



by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.
Scanned in 2018.
Jodey Bateman may be
contacted on Facebook.

02.B

Introduction by Jodey to -
"The Rainbow Family"
[2 of 2]

12 pages

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this book, see Jean Vision's account of the Love Family, Alta's story of how Gaskin's Farm developed from the Harbinger Community and descriptions of Gaskin's Farm by Matt and Scotter.

However, many people might not prefer to "survive" and "prosper" on such terms. In this book, the Flowering Tree is an account of a group of people who keep in touch with each other and live together when they can find land to squat on.

As individuals or as groups, many thousands of city dropout youth moved into rural areas.

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In May, 1970, the radical youth movement reached its height. When the US invaded Cambodia, the National Guard killed four anti-war demonstrators at Kent State University in Ohio and two at Jackson State University in Mississippi. Student strikes closed down 400 universities and colleges across the country in protest. Chuck Windsong, who was deeply upset about the killings, went into the forests of Washington State and camped with his cousin Barry. Barry had left Haight-Ashbury long before and was now helping draft dodgers and deserters get across the border into Canada. That week of invasion and killings and student strike, Barry and Chuck shared a vision of inviting everyone who would come to stand silent at noon in a circle on a mountaintop on the Fourth of July to pray for peace.

It took over two years of preparation before Barry, Chuck, Garrick, Karen, Jean Vision and the others who became involved could have the silent circle at the first Rainbow Gathering in the mountains of Colorado, July 4, 1972. During those two years, the left-wing movement went through a period of decline. Already in June, 1969, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) the main radical youth organization, had split at its national convention. SDS chapters around the country had mostly refused to follow any of the rival factions. Thus, the student strike of May, 1970 was not co-ordinated by any national organization and there was no way of keeping

the energy going.

By this time, large numbers of SDS'ers and other leftists were mentally and physically exhausted from five years of working against a war that went on and on. In May, 1970, there was hope that the revolution - or at least the end of the war - would come soon. By that fall the hope was dying down. Some places the hope died later than others. In outlying areas, young people were just starting to turn onto the counter-culture and the vague hope of the revolution while in the main centers, the hope was dying. There was a brief surge of hope again around the May Day anti-war demonstrations of 1971, which Gipsy Tex tells about in this book, but the hope died down again.

The left-wing people who had provided the moral leadership for the counter-culture communities went out of action. Some went to graduate school, others to a piece of land in the country and others to heavy alcohol and drug use. Some kept on with the struggle, but the media weren't paying attention and the goals looked further away than ever.

In 1972, an article in US News and World Report noted that as protest died down, crime in campus areas was increasing. With no more goal of a revolution to give a moral purpose, the dropouts and runaways in college fringe areas started stealing more and more. As trust broke down, students and other people were no longer ready to give them a place to stay. The use of LSD and other psychedelics declined. There was a big increase in the use of alcohol, downers and heroin. Apparently in most people, psychedelics inspire bright, hopeful visions and when people no longer believe they can make these visions into reality, they prefer to blot them out. In this book, Rufus connects the demoralization of the street people in Austin with the decline of the left-wing movement.

As young people lost faith that the revolution would come soon to

transform the world, many came to believe that Jesus would come soon to do the same thing. Jesus freak groups grew rapidly in counter-culture communities. They usually disapproved of some things that were considered basic in the counter-culture - like pot-smoking, non-married sex and protesting against the war. The basic viewpoint of most Jesus freak groups was socially conservative. Although most Jesus freaks did not think of themselves as political at all, they disapproved of protest activities - anything that might hint that people could make the world a better place by their own efforts. Only Jesus could do that at his coming. Jesus freak groups gave some young people stability and hope as the counter-culture communities around them fell into moral chaos, but they didn't have the kind of moral leadership in the counter-culture that the left-wing groups once had. The Jesus freaks did not see their job as improving the scene, but as helping their converts to be in the scene but not of it. The same thing is true of the numerous eastern religious groups that began to flourish at this time. They regarded the counter-culture not as something good in itself that should be developed, but as a hunting ground for converts.

(See in this book the accounts of the Christ Family as well as Matt's brief experience as a Jesus freak and Billy Star's time in Krishna Consciousness. Also Buzzard who tells about a long spiritual quest from the Pentecostals to the Bahais.)

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Among the Plains Indians when they were conquered, the Ghost Dance arose - the faith that an Indian Savior would appear who would renew the earth and revive all the Indians that the white guns and diseases had slain and all the buffalo herds the whites had destroyed. It would be sudden - all that would be necessary was to keep dancing the Ghost Dance, making that energy circle until soon the power would come to redeem the land for the Indians. For some, the first Rainbow Gathering in Colorado was a Ghost Dance for the hippie movement.

July 3, 1972, Phil Coyote looked over the thousands of people he had helped prepare the way for in the Colorado mountains. These people

had dared a National Guard road block to gather at the foot of Table Mountain, the holy mountain of the Arapaho Indians, ready to go to the top and make the silent circle as the spirit had said on the Fourth of July. The counter-culture was in decay. The non-religious protest movement that had given it purpose was too weak to stop the decay. So a spiritual renewal movement brought these people to the Rainbow Gathering at Table Mountain. Phil tells his hope at that time - the hope of many who came for the immediate redemption of the counter-culture, a vision straight out of the Ghost Dance.

"I thought it was the end of an old world, the start of a new one. We expected things at the gathering too quick. We expected that the fences would come down around the world, the prisons would crumble, the cities would be gone and the buffalo would come back and Christ would return."

The next day, the great circle on the mountain was held. Phil Coyote comments, "A lot of people went up to Table Mountain to wait for the world to end. It didn't." But Phil didn't go up the mountain to see what did happen. Apparently Table Mountain is the center in a mountain complex that might be compared to a human nervous system. This center would amplify the energy raised by this huge circle of intensely praying silent people as they gathered on the day of independence with the sun directly overhead. Many Rainbow people deeply enjoy the release of energy from what Light Owl calls "a lot of strong praying." Jayson apparently considers the "boogieing and praying" he did in Colorado to be different aspects of the same thing.

The human energy was apparently supported by the energy of the natural world. The deepest feeling of Rainbow people seems to be that the inmost energy of humans, the sun, the mountains and the other natural objects is the same as what has been called God or spirits. Chuck Wind song told me "Barry and I seen Christ appear

on Table Mountain. At every gathering people have seen him ascend. I asked Chuck did he mean descend but he insisted Christ ascended from the earth. In other words, the earth we are on now is a sacred place as much as any far-off heaven or different state of consciousness. This sacredness is recognized in many ways, from praying on a mountain top to picking up cigaret butts and waste paper from the ground after the gathering is over.

I have used the word energy a lot. It is a frequent word in Rainbow. Someone will tell a friend "I like your energy." Matt would not use cocaine because the greed of the coke dealers "fucked up the energy around the cocaine." Once when somebody started to crush a cockroach on a blanket at a gathering, the blanket's owner, nine-year-old Erica came running to prevent the insect from being killed. "No!" she shouted. "I don't want that kind of energy in my blanket!" The world is felt as all alive, with everything radiating energy—good or bad—that can connect it to everything else. And there is trust that the most basic energy is good.

Of course, not enough energy was raised on Table Mountain to transform the world in a moment. But there was enough generated to begin to drive back the darkness that had fallen on the counter-culture. A long, slow process began there of individuals changing and communities trying to form—using the Rainbow Gatherings as a focus. It is not being done by a spectacular, apocalyptic force from the outside, but by slow, steady work—like digging latrines at the gathering. The Rainbow Family links together many thousands of people—more all the time. The Family is assuming the moral leadership among counter-culture youth that the left-wing groups had in the Sixties. When I hitch around the US, many young people who pick me up have heard of the gathering and wish they could go. If they know nothing else about Rainbow, they believe it stands for share what you have and don't steal.

The history of Rainbow has been the search for a world

where individuals, given differences in age and amount of knowledge, can maximize the input of their consciousness into society—in less fancy words, have the most possible to say about the decisions that affect their lives.

"I felt everybody had copped out" Phil Coyote said after the second gathering. "I felt it was bullshit, everybody saying 'I love you, brother' once a year and then splitting up for the rest of the year... I'm tired of interstate highways. I'm tired of crying out, of coming to the Family's camp at gatherings—and then we scatter like crows."

Phil and many others who had hoped for a sudden, world-transforming event at the first gathering now had the hope that some day the gathering would be so perfectly conducted that everybody who came would be able to stay at the gathering site, and form a huge, permanent commune. Too often this hope did not go along with efforts to make the gathering work well.

In practice, as anthropology student Monte Tidwell noted in his study of the 1977 New Mexico Gathering "There seems to be a commune circuit that most of these [road] people use for places to stay. When asked where they are from, some common replies are 'everywhere', 'nowhere' and 'here'. Some people reply that they alternate from commune to commune, depending on conditions within each commune and the season." Phil Coyote uses the same phrase—"doing the circuit"—for his journeys from Flowering Tree to the Love Family to other communities.

Many of these communes and spiritual communities identify to some degree with Rainbow, but keep an independent identity. The pressure of wandering transients on their resources is one of the factors that has helped bring some of them to an end—though more spring up. Rainbow has tried to start its own communities—but not on as big a scale as the whole gathering staying in place. Since the 1973 Wyoming

Gathering there have been work caravans looking for jobs and places to camp. In this book, Tisco, Sarra and Medicine Story tell about the caravan from the Wyoming Gathering. Jay Sun and Feather tell of the caravan from the 1975 Arkansas Gathering to Stillwater, Oklahoma in their own life stories and in comments inside Barry's story. Other accounts of the 1975 caravan occur in the stories of Sarah and Fire Scott, Jerry and Foxfire. Mike S. and Daniel tell as Oklahoma youth of the effect the caravan had on their lives.

The caravans helped encourage people in the search for community but created no lasting community of their own. In 1977 the Peace Village concept started in Rainbow—the idea of getting a piece of land from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in exchange for work to repair ecological damage on BLM land—such as by forest, erosion or floods. The Carter Administration negotiated with Garrick, Medicine Story and others who have played leading roles in Rainbow about the labor-for-land exchange. Meanwhile temporary Peace Camps were set up—one at Velarde, New Mexico in 1977 that lasted from July till October and a moveable Peace camp that began at Ashland, Oregon after the 1978 gathering and moved to Clifton, Arizona and then to California on the opposite side of the Colorado River from Yuma, Arizona, where it was dissolved in February, 1979.

At the time the Peace Camps were set up, life was still relatively easy for the people whose whole lives were on the road. Often they behaved irresponsibly. Other people with more education and skills—technical and social—also had more alternatives and left the camps when difficulties started. For more on Peace Camps and their problems see in this book the life story of Carlos and his comments on Eden Hot Springs and the life stories of Nashema and Star Beaver.

Since Reagan became president, negotiations with the government for a Peace Village have ended. Yet there are more transient youth on the road than ever—largely as a result of Reagan's economic policies. And even now young people are dropping out of what could be comfortable lives to cast onto the road to look for a community that might be

materially more difficult, but spiritually more rewarding. (See Leroy's life story in this book.)

The January 2, 1984 issue of Newsweek has a cover story on "Homeless in America" that talks of this problem not only for youth but for the elderly and for former mental patients. Arizona alone is estimated to have five to ten thousand transients—1,500 of them in the Phoenix area. Both Phoenix and Tucson have mayors who were elected on platforms

of getting rid of the transients. Across the US, carrying a back pack or a sleeping bag is becoming a way to be refused admission to a store or to be questioned by cops and ordered to move on.

These developments have brought growth and a new seriousness to Rainbow. Now regional gatherings are held around the US in the Fall and Spring. Winter camps are set up near places like Santa Cruz, California where Rainbow people have negotiated with the park department, the police and the Catholic church to provide a place where transients can spend the winter without harassment.

In turn, Rainbow socializes young people against stealing or depending on food stamps and tries to provide alternatives like group searches for part-time jobs—usually in agriculture and construction and making and selling handcrafts. An example of Rainbow people helping the homeless is Community House in Tucson which Scott tells of in this book. The spiritual emphasis and the comradeship of Rainbow keep the dignity and the morale of the transient youth up. Rainbow has taught many young people how to build a camp in the woods and keep it clean and how to live without food stamps on the amazing supply of day-old vegetables in supermarket dumpsters if no jobs are available. Some of the kitchens and shelters Rainbow people have made out of scraps are small works of art.

Many who have been in the leadership of Rainbow, such as Steven and Mary Sun have stepped aside because of exhaustion, need to take care of personal business or other interests. Yet they maintain contact and

concern with Rainbow. A new leadership group is developing who have much more direct contact with the road scene.

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Rainbow is taken as a serious threat by some who would like American youth to turn to racism and to a glorification of violence and authoritarian leadership as a way out of the growing social strain. Although there are only a few blacks in Rainbow, the Family is overall a strong influence against racism among the young people in our society who are most vulnerable to racist views. This is why Klansmen murdered two women on their way to the 1980 West Virginia Rainbow Gathering and shot at Barry. The Nazis threatened the farmer who let the gathering use his land for a parking lot.

The influence of Rainbow, direct or indirect, is spreading. Rainbow people have set up kitchens and medical tents at anti-nuclear demonstrations and helped develop the anti-nuclear movement in an open, democratic way much more so than the anti-war coalitions of the Sixties where representatives of small organizations made policy for many thousands of relatively passive demonstrators. Rainbow people have tried to be a trustworthy link between the American Indian struggle and the white public. The whole model of demonstrations that grew up in the seventies - of camps deciding their own affairs as communities like the Sea Brook and Diablo Canyon anti-nuclear demonstrations and the Trident submarine demonstration - is strongly influenced by Rainbow. Rainbow has become involved in the revival of protest movements and has helped politicize many transient youth. (See the accounts of Barry, Sunny, Garrick, Medicine Story, Jay Sun and Feather.)

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"I was hitch hiking" a sister says "and some college boys picked me up and I told them about the Rainbow and they asked 'Do you have to pay dues to join that Rainbow club?'"

"Sure, everybody's got to pay dues. But you don't have to pull them out of your pocket."

At this stage the story of Rainbow has to be told in terms of individual life stories. There is very little statistical information. And commitment to Rainbow, to whatever degree, is a deeply personal thing that each person brings a special quality to. Each of these stories sheds a different light on American culture and its counter-culture. I find the different accounts of the same events especially interesting.

Certainly these stories are not propaganda for the counter-culture or Rainbow. There are enough brutal and/or bizarre events in them. While Charles Reich was writing The Greening of America about how the counterculture's consciousness III would peacefully lead America to Utopia, in the same state of Connecticut where he was greening, Sarah Windfire was struggling to revive her boyfriend who was paralyzed from an LSD freakout. If these stories show Rainbow as the beautiful and healing and liberating thing that I believe it is, it is not because there is an effort to hide ugliness and weirdness.

Above all, Rainbow is a family—a family of thousands that has formed after the disintegration of the old authoritarian families. I have not used the word love yet, but that is the main attraction that draws people into Rainbow and keeps them involved over the years.

I have written these stories down in the smoke of campfires — under plastic sheets stretched two feet off the ground as rain poured down — in dark tipis by the light of a flashlight — by the roadside hitchhiking. I have lost some pages here and there, but the generosity of my brothers and sisters has more than made up for it. I have often been struck by their deep willingness to forgive one another in these stories. People would tell me painfully embarrassing stories about themselves but ask me to leave out something that might look too bad about someone else. I believe these stories convey the possible flavor of these

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life of the future of The US - and the earth are at a turning point. As Orwell says in 1984, it's impossible for a small group of people to dominate the majority in an atmosphere of long-term freedom, prosperity and access to information. By the beginning of the real year 1984, the people who control the wealth and power of the USA showed that they agreed with Orwell. The economic policies pursued under Carter and even more under Reagan show the over-all purpose of cutting down the share of the economy that wage-earners get. Scare propaganda is being used to create a war psychology and lessen our political freedom. I believe this attempted lessening of the political and economic power of the majority of people is surely partly so that there will be no more generations like the Sixties to rebel against those who control our country. And Rainbow keeps the potential of the Sixties alive.

In spite of the hardships at gatherings and elsewhere told about in this book, the Rainbow Family are the children of prosperous times and modern technology. The Family has its wilderness survival experts, but it has far more good truck mechanics. If modern technology is to continue to benefit the majority of the people - or perhaps even survive at all - the whole process of work, of producing what is needed, has to be reorganized. Political freedom cannot survive in a society where the major places of production are still run as dictatorships, where workers are not supposed to even be interested in what they are producing, much less make decisions about it. Rainbow has shown a more humane, non-hierarchical way of organizing work and presented it to the young people of this country. These youth will be the ones to decide if this is how society is to be reorganized when it reaches its inevitable crisis.

Jay Sun and I wrote a song to be performed by Rainbow people for a large audience in Mexico City - a song that sums the hope and the urgency: "We all walk in the same sunlight
And we all breathe the same air
And we all love our children
And we all must learn to share" August 24, 1984

[Notes: in the life stories, comments inside brackets are by me, Jodey Bateman.]

Rainbow people have a habit of changing names from time to time in a very bewildering way. Often one person will have two or three names or two people will have the same or similar names. For the ease of readers I have edited the life stories to try to come as close as possible to the goal of one name to one person most of the time.]

The Gatherings and related events

Vortex Festival near Portland, Oregon - August, 1970

Gronby, Colorado - June-July 1972

Lander, Wyoming - June-July 1973

Highbridge Park, Spokane Washington - May-June 1974

Virgin River, Utah - June-July 1974

Buffalo River, Arkansas - June-July 1975

Jones Creek near Choteau, Montana - June-July 1976

Gila River near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico - June-July 1977

Peace Camp Velarde, New Mexico - July-October 1977

Upper Umpqua Valley, Oregon - June-July 1978

Peace Camp Ashland Ore. - Clifton, Ariz., Mohave Desert Cal. - July 1978-Feb 1979

White Mountains near Alpine, Arizona - June-July, 1979

Allegheny National Forest, West Virginia - June-July 1980

near Spokane, Washington - June-July 1981

near Council, Idaho - June-July 1982

near Waters Meet, Michigan - June-July 1983

Warner Mountains, California - June-July 1984

Mark Twain National Forest, Missouri - June-July 1985

Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania - June-July 1986

Nantahala National Forest, North Carolina - June-July 1987